

Wellness Notes

Kidney Disease*

(Part III)

● Treatment and Research

There are several types of treatments related to kidney disease. Some are used in earlier stages of kidney disease to keep your kidneys healthier longer. These medications and lifestyle changes help you maintain kidney function and postpone kidney failure. Other treatments, such as dialysis and transplantation, are used in later stages of kidney disease. These methods help replace kidney function if your own kidneys have stopped working.

Researchers are working at every stage of kidney disease to improve diagnosis and treatment. Some are trying to find a better way to identify who is at greatest risk for rapidly progressing kidney disease. Some are trying to find more effective medications to treat kidney disease and its risk factors. And some are working to improve dialysis and the results of kidney transplantation.

Treatments for early kidney disease include both lifestyle changes and medications. Lifestyle changes, such as eating less and exercising regularly to maintain a healthy weight, can help prevent the diseases that cause kidney damage. If you already have diabetes and/or high blood pressure, keeping these conditions under control can keep them from causing further damage to your kidneys.

Restricting your use of salt can be an important lifestyle change, as this helps control blood pressure. For people with greatly reduced kidney function, another change often recommended by experts is to follow a moderate-protein diet. Because protein makes your kidneys work harder, eating less protein may help delay progression to kidney failure. Anyone considering dietary changes because of kidney disease should work with a dietitian to ensure that they are getting proper nutrition.

Medications can also help keep kidneys healthier longer. Two types of blood-pressure medications -- angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, and angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs) -- have been shown to slow down kidney disease and delay kidney failure. These medications have been shown to work in people who have either diabetes or high blood pressure, and many other kinds of kidney disease, to protect kidney function.

Some older adults with kidney disease may be taking medications for other diseases as well. As kidney disease progresses, it is likely that the doctor will need to adjust the dosages of all medications being taken. Not all treatments are right for all people. Be sure to talk to your doctor and other health professionals -- including nurses, dietitians, and diabetes educators -- to figure out the best treatment plan for you. The right choice for you depends upon your medical condition, lifestyle, and personal likes and dislikes.